

and free
personal life

Log 955
Captain Rodolphus N. Swift
Narrative of mishaps and narrow escapes
during his whaling career (1827-50)
and after his retirement from the sea.
Written in 1895, at age 85.

- (1) Ship *Canton* of New Bedford
28 July 1827 - 19 June 1828
Shubael Hawes, master; Rodolphus N. Swift (Seaman or Green Hand), keeper
Brazil Banks, 1827 (Partial ab stract) —pp. 1-9
- (2) Ship *Canton* of New Bedford
23 August 1828 - 26 May 1831
Abram Gardner, master; Rodolphus N. Swift (Boatsteerer), keeper
Pacific Ocean (Partial abstract) —pp. 10-18
- (3) Ship *Canton* of New Bedford
19 August 1831 - 31 May 1834
Abram Gardner, master; Rodolphus N. Swift (Second Mate), keeper
Pacific Ocean (Partial abstract) —pp. 18-22
- (4) Ship *Lancaster* of New Bedford
1 November 1834 - 20 May 1838
Rodolphus N. Swift, master and keeper
Pacific Ocean (Partial abstract) —pp. 22-24
- (5) Post-retirement experiences logging in the South —pp. 25-31

Note: Capt. Swift misleadingly states (p. 25) that he "retired from the sea" on the proceeds of his second voyage as master of the *Lancaster* (1838-42), which he may well have done (in terms of that voyage having provided the wherewithal), but, in fact, he made one addition voyage as master, his third, in the ship *Leonidas*, 1845-50.

FROM: STUART M. FRANK, *DICTIONARY OF SCRIMSHAW ARTISTS*, 1991.

Swift, Rodolphus Nye (fl. circa 1827-50). New Bedford whaling master credited with a panbone bird-cage, in KWM. Born at Fairhaven in 1810, he made three voyages in the ship *Canton* of New Bedford (1827-34), and advanced rapidly to his first captaincy at age 24. He was master of two voyages in the ship *Lancaster* of New Bedford (1834-42), between which he married Sylvia H. Nye of Fairhaven in 1838. His last recorded command was the ship *Leonidas* (1845-50).

FROM: STUART M. FRANK, *DICTIONARY OF SCRIMSHAW ARTISTS, SUPPLEMENT* (DRAFT MS 1994):

Swift, Rodolphus N. During his active career as a whaling master he lived at Acushnet, Mass., where he married Sylvia H. Nye; in later years he moved his family to Fairhaven, where he was a dealer in timber. Of their five children, whom Rodolphus and Sylvia evidently provided an excellent education, the oldest son, Rupert G. N. Swift (born in 1844 or 1845), was also a whaleman in his youth: his journal of two voyages in the ship *Contest* of New Bedford during 1866-70 (KWM #234) is distinguished by its humorous commentary, whimsical sketches, Shakespearean allusions, exceptionally fine original poetry and song lyrics, and miscellaneous entries in classical Latin and Greek (variously anthologized in Miller, *And the Whale Is Ours*, 1979; Martin, *Whalemen's Paintings and Drawings*, 1983; Frank, *Ballads and Songs of the Whale-Hunters*, 1985, #140; and Frank, "'Wood and Black-Skin': The Peripatetic Whaling Wiles of R. G. N. Swift, Songwriter, and the Greatest Whaling Poem Ever Composed," 1988). "Rupe" Swift was afterwards owner and master of the coastwise merchant schooner *Minnehaha* of New Bedford, 1876-78. However, Rodolphus Swift's better-known son was the younger of the two, Clement Nye Swift (1846-1918), a marine artist and animal painter who studied at the Ecole des Beaux Artes, exhibited in Paris and at the National Academy, and is remembered today primarily for his scenes of the whale fishery (drawings and sketches in KWM, NBWM, and private collections).

August 1895.

Having in the course of my life passed through many mishaps any one of which could and would with a slight change in direction have proved fatal instantly or in a few moments I have taken the notion to write out each circumstance just as it occurred.

In the year 1827 I slept on board the ship Canton of New Bedford Capt Shovel Hauoe for a voyage to the Brazil Banks off the Coast of Patagonia. I was then seventeen years of age. In getting under weight from the stream as it was then called above Palmer's Lob in latting the anchor there was a dozen or more were hoisting on the Cat. ^{the} ~~the~~ and I was holding the ^{Fish} ~~the~~ behind them as we had the anchor almost up to the ^{rig} ~~the~~ ~~hooked~~ ~~into~~ by the fish the Fish Pendant at the head of the Fore mast parted and the upper Fish Table Block which was a very large and heavy four sheved block came down with terrible force and hit just escaping me, it passed down my right shoulder tearing off my flat rim and splitting open my back from ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ without hurting me on the ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ it knocked me down but did not hurt

me in the heart. Had it fell only a few 2
inches further aboard or to the left I would
have washed me to a shapeless mass.
I remember the mate looking round and
saying is that Boy hurt. I replied promptly no
for not at all. Well Boy ^{he said} your time hadnt come
that is all there is. Another chance for you.
The mates name was Thos Harris who was
afterwards killed by some of the crew of the ship
Sharon I think of Fairhaven of which he
was master. They clinched him when the Boats
were off after whales and cut his throat.
afterwards whilst on the Banks one day we
saw whales suddenly quite near the ship
it was almost calm but there was a very
bad swell and the ship was laying in the
troth of it rolling very badly. In a moment
everything was confusion on board there was
never much order, system, or regularity during
that voyage. The Boats were or were lowered
in great haste and confusion. I pulled the
after bar in the mates Boat and we
went down by the gun just as the ship
rolled to starboard. The tackle not being unhocked
they drew us as the ship made a terrible roll
to starboard directly under her counter.
she was a very hollow countered ship and
our Boat for down towards her keel, as she

turned to roll back, the mate swung out &
now threw her off. I the only one of the Boats crew
obeyed or cleis. I put both hands against the
bright copper and tried to shove off. The ships
bottom was directly over my head, As she rolled
back she came directly down on me striking me
on the head and washing me down on
the bottom of the Boat my head scraped down
the copper some distance before she broke me
down. We got away with every knee on that
side of the Boat broken and the ground broke
in several places, We got out our oars and started
for the whales when we had pulled a few strokes
I saw the mate look down at me as if I was
not doing my best. He said to himself as it seemed
to me My God, and laid the ^{Boat} right round
and pulled for the ship. The blood was streaming
down my face from my eyes, nose ears and mouth
and I had so much difficulty of breathing that
I could not pull my oar the mate ordered me
to stick on my oar and helped me to do it
When I got on board ^{the ship} the mate called for
another man a 'pent off after the whales
he told me to go below and turn in and I did
do. The Boats soon came back the whales and
gon off. It seemed to me a terrible long time
before anyone took any notice of me. My
neck head and shoulders were by this time as

Still as a crow bar and very sore and 4
my brain felt very heavy as if I had a very
heavy weight upon it of my head. In the morning
of an hour the mate come down to see me
in the Forecastle to see how I felt. I
told him that I could not move my head or
shoulders and that there was a terrible pressure
upon my head. He said just lay still and
be quiet. I was easy enough to lay still since
I could not move. I lay there all night and until
the next day in the afternoon. Trying to study
out what I should do. This seemed to have forgotten
me entirely off and as the day wore on I began
to make up my mind that I had to scull my own
boat. I felt very much hurt. Capt. Harb. knew
my father and Mother well had always known
them and I was surprised that he did not try
to do something for me about the middle of the
afternoon Our Boat Steerer who was a tall
large Gay Head Indian come down to see me
I had secured the friendship of this noble fellow
by my appeals to him to show and learn me
Seamanship and everything of that nature and
prevailed on him to always call me when he
wanted any one to help fall or help him
in any job of Seamanship and I did my best to
learn and please him so that I came to be his
favorite. He was a quiet still orderly man seldom
made any talk and never mixed up with the

best of the ships company but always ready for ⁵
any duty and very efficient everywhere he
was wanted. When he came down to see ^{me} I at once
made up my mind that here was my best friend
and that I would appeal to him alone.
On his enquiring how I was I told him how I
felt and said that I would be glad of his advice
for I thought that I ^{was} pretty badly hurt and did
not know myself what to do and no one seemed
to trouble themselves about me. So I said to
him Ephraim if you will advise me and care for
me whilst I am helpless I will always remember
your kindness and stand by you as best I can
always. He said my dear Boy I will do the best
and all I can for you but I know no more
about doctoring than a child not half as much as
you do for you always know everything as soon
as you see it. I will go aft and see Capt Hays
and see if something cannot be done for you.
I said my good friend dont for Gd sake say
one word about me to any one aft, just
let them take their own way and time. Then
I asked him to examine my head and see if it
was all right and thick shape and I sat up in
my berth so that he could see me. He looked me
over and then said very soberly well old Boy
you will have to trim. Then you have got an
head to starboard your face and head are both
sided and taking out his sheath knife he laid

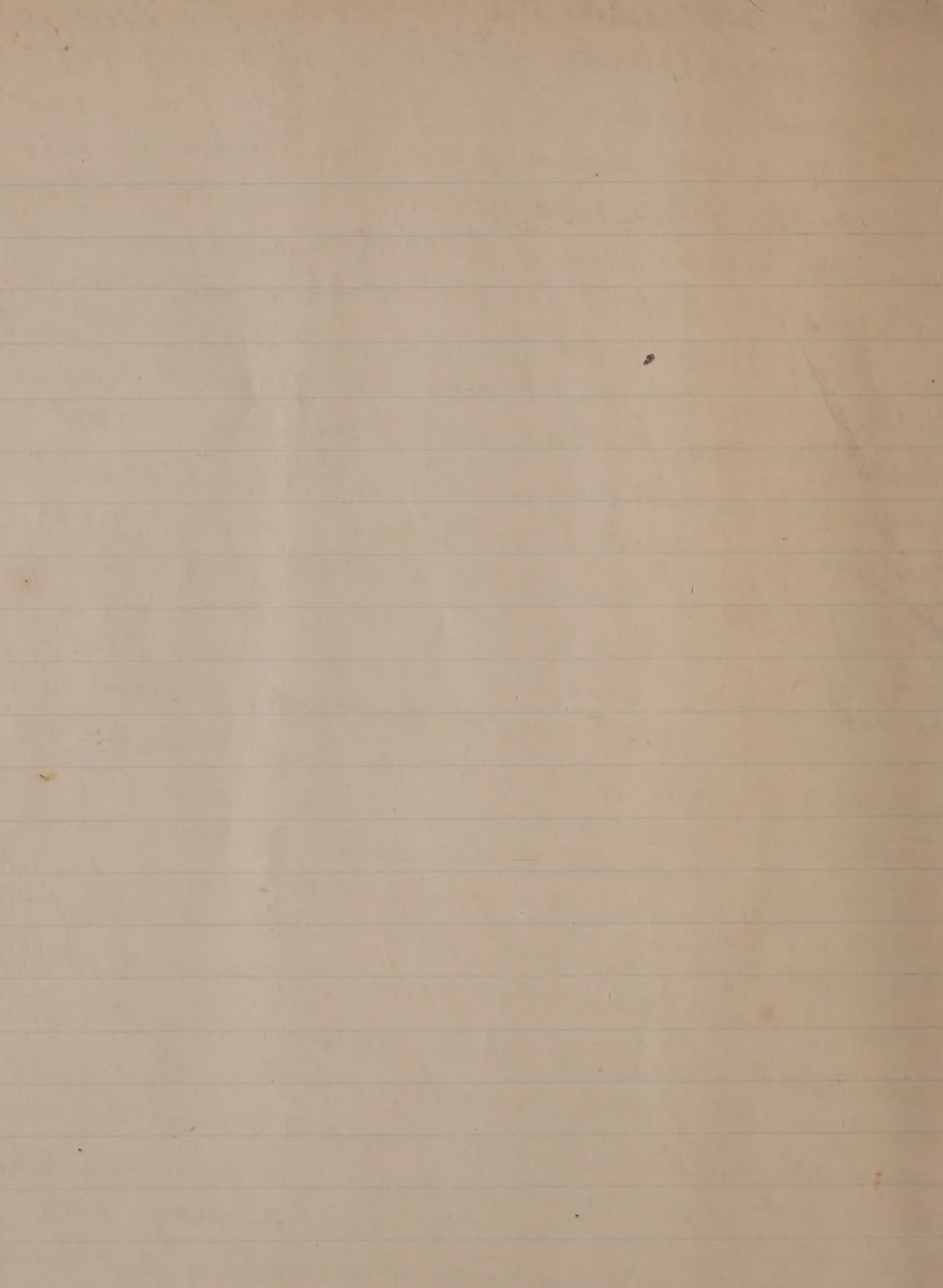
it across my face and said that the Starboard ⁶
Side of my face was lower by over an inch than
the other. I asked him to get a shaving glass out
of my chest and let me see how it was. I saw
that when my head scraped down the ship's bottom
it had marked that side down more than an inch.
I saw that my face was misshapen and that I was a
sad looking object. And the first thought was that
it probably ^{might} always be so. I laid down to think and Ed
went to his duty. I lay for hours trying to think
what I would do and said to myself that if my angel
mother had me she would surely bring me round but
here in this cold Forecastle with the tobacco smoke so
thick half the time that it ^{was} impossible for me to breathe
without putting my face in a pillow and drawing my
breath through it. At last I made up my mind what I
would try to do and that I ^{would} follow it up to the hilt.
And I commenced at once to carry out my plan. It
was to try to press my head and face back into shape
if possible. I would put one hand under my chin
on the right side and the other on the top of my
head on the other side and press as hard as I
could bear it very carefully and steadily trying to
keep a steady pressure as long as I could. It made
my arms and hands ache but I persevered. It did
not much hurt my head it seemed to me that I could
^{sometimes} feel the bones move and after a short time
I got so practiced at pressing my head that I could
keep up a steady pressure for an hour at a time and
sometimes got to sleep pressing steadily. The next day
again came down to see. I asked ^{him} to see if I had made
any progress in righting ^{my} ship and told him what

I was trying to do, he put his knife over my face
and said that it ^{was} not near as bad as it was, I
should succeed he believed if I kept on. Then he
said what have you eaten, I said ^{nothing} since I was hurt
I could not eat anything all my teeth ~~are~~ loose I
could hook them all out with my fingers, and I
may as well say here that it was a year before
my teeth were given on my jaws. I then took my
tin pot and brought me a pot of what he called
Coffey on board which with pounded hard bread in
very thin I could with much difficulty and pain
swallow some of it was warm and made my stomach
feel much better and from this time I ate nothing
else for nearly two months. I kept the pressure up on
my face and generally succeeded in forcing my
jaw nearly back. I was young and healthy the bones
were soft and pliable and so I succeeded when
an old person would have failed and would
probably died with concussion of the brain very soon after
the accident whilst laying there so helpless and
suffering attended only by my Indian friend
I made up my mind that if ever it was my
fate to have command of a ship or to command
men in any way that no one under my command
should suffer if I could relieve him. And now at
this late hour of my life I feel a great satisfaction
in being able to say that I have not only always
done this but found great pleasure in doing it.

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I kept up the pressure in my head and
succeeded in pressing it back so far that no
one would notice that the right side of my face
was a little lower than the other unless their
attention was called to it. We had bad weather
for more than a week and did not see whales
for a good while. Ephraim's sympathy and kind
attention to me was my great joy and I always
asked his advice about anything that I thought
of doing. He was a noble fellow but I always
thought that he was not understood. He
was so reserved and distant. I never knew
whether Ephraim ever said anything to
the boat or mate about me but after I
got better their manner towards me
changed. Finally in about three weeks
we saw whales and got one. When we got
him to the ship and commenced cutting
him in I went on deck and went off
to the Grind Stone and asked the Portugues
that usually turned the Stone to let me
turn as I could do nothing else so I
took his place. Ephraim came off and saw
me turning the Stone to grind blades and
said that I had forgotten his advice, so
we he had given advice of it was not followed
and went down soon after I saw him talking
with the Hawk. who came off in a few
moments and asked me what I was doing

there in this rain storm. It had been raining 9
and blowing for a good while. I said I thought
sir that I could do this duty well enough
and to please a better man for other duty than
I could not do. He said that went do there is
men enough you will break down go below
and stay there. I said yes sir. but I think that
I can do it all right. Go below was the order and
I went. afterwards I attempted to go to the men
work but the mate drove me below. and before
we saw any more whales I was at my duty
and did not look on hours time after duty
the voyage. Esprain took me to his heart and
was always ready to show me everything about
seaman ship and was at the end of the voyage
as Capt. Halse reported to the owners as. Mr
Esprain afterwards told me as good a seaman
as there was in the ship. I was more indebted to
the full blooded Gay Head Indian than
to any other man in my life for his
friendship was in no way mercenary he
never got anything from me but kindness
I never saw him after the ship arrived
home.

After I arrived home from the voyage 10
on the Brazil Banks. Mr. Nye who was the
agent and owner of the ship Conton. Sent
for me to come down and see him. He told
me that the ship was going round to the Pacific
under the command of Abram Gardner and
he thought that I ought to go with him
as a Boat Steerer as I had told him that I
would follow it up. I was very much surprised
at this offer as I had only been one short
voyage and was only on my eighteenth year
a minor boy and a light one at that only
weighing 112 lbs. I hesitated a little and he asked
me if I did not think that I could do the duty
I replied that I did not have a doubt but that
I could do the duty myself but what does Capt
Gardner think of so light a Boat Steerer. Oh,
he said that was all right I said I should like
Capt Gardner would talk with Gov. Howe
or better still with Mr. Morris the mate en route
boat I was. Oh he said they he and Capt
Gardner had already done so. And that Capt
G had asked him to ship me as a Boat Steerer
before he had said anything about it. That Gov
Howe had filed with his papers when he came
home a list of men that deserved promotion and
that I was the first on the list as yet was
he said that I did not see anything but what
I could do but the overboards and I feared



no doubt get some of the other Boat Steerer 11
to go my overboards for me. I replied that as
to that duty I should be I thought very
strong that I was not at home in the water
that it depended almost entirely whether the
overboard was confident and fearless as
to his efficiency if he was afraid as more than
half of them was the bigger he was the worse it
did not require so much strength as skill and
pluck. So I signed the articles and done the
only so well that the same Lark shore me for
his second mate the next voyage, there is a good
many things that occurred during this voyage
that would perhaps be interesting but I forbear to
state them as the purpose of these papers is to
narrate the escapes I had from harm in my
line of duty. After this on the same voyage
Another Boat Steerer and myself was sent
up to send down the Main Top Galant Yard
there was a bad sea on and the ship was
rolling terribly running off the wind. He sawed
up the yard and got it pointed down when
down about of the Top Mast rigging I was
following it down having hold of the
lower Flemish Horse to steady the yard
the ship gave a terrible roll to starboard
I had hold of the Flemish Horse with both
hands with my leg twisted round the shroud
to hold me the roll was so deep that it

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broke the hold of my legs from the shroud
and I swung off with the yard dangling at
its lower end. I went off more than twenty
feet and when the ship started to roll back
I saw instantly that I must get clear of the
yard before it struck the top most shrouds or I
should be crippled and drop overboard.
At such supreme moments one can think
very fast. at least I can. the only effect that
great risk or great and sudden danger ever
has on me is that I can think on hundred
times as quick and coolly as at other times
I never was affected in my life in any other
way. As the yard swung on I instantly made
the plan to try to shoot through the top most
rigging between the rollings feet first. I knew
that the chance was a small one the space
between the rollings was very small barely large
enough to crawl through with plenty of time
and that I must hit exactly right or be
badly hurt. and drop overboard. As the yard
swung on I raised up both feet and legs and
pointed my feet for the opening directly, a burst of
me. I hit the horse fairly my feet and legs
passed through until the seat of my trousers
caught on the rail and broke it then
I kept through to my arms just then the
yard thrashed against the shrouds just
as I let go of the Flemish Horse. I kept through

and reached out one hand and one
legg caught the Main Top Sail tie and hid
down it to the Top. It only took a moment to do
it the Ship was now rolling off again I caught the
end of the Main Top Galant Storing Sail halgords
that lay under my feet as the yard came in and
struck the Shrouds I hauled a round turn around
the yard pat down the Top braced my feet against
the Top Mast Lead Eye and hung on to both
horns of the turn the Ship rolled off again but
I held on for dear life and succeeded in holding
it calling to the Boat Wrecker above me to come to
my help he held it until the Ship got steady
then called out to the Deck for them to
lower away quickly he paying out our turn
until he landed the yard on deck then he went
down on deck the order was given to haul the
overhead on the Shores. I got up on the Shores
to receive it with the other Boat Wrecker and
stowed and locked it. The job thus completed
I pacing myself down to the deck by some of the
Running rigging and wanted to go forward but
found that I could not move my right legg and
had to get hold of a belaying pin to keep from

falling. One of the Boat Steers helped take it
to the main hatch where there was several
Boat Steers and the third mate. To the enquiry
if I was hurt I said that I did not know I had
felt no pain only I could not use my right leg
an amputation showed that my right leg
was mangled and the skin torn off most of
the way from my ankle to the hip three inches
wide most of the way and the flesh torn and
mangled. Just then the second mate came up
looked at the wound then looked in my face to
see I suppose how I bore it. He then said hold
on a minute as you are sent off and spoke
to Capt. Gardner and both came back to the
main hatch. The Capt. looked at the wounded
leg and said pick him right up and take
him down below. My berth was in the lobby.
They attempted to pick me up as the Capt. had
ordered but I could not let them take hold
of the game legs. A debate arose about the
best way I cut it short by killing Ebbert
Munton a large bonesfull Indian to let me
get on his back and he carried me down
all right and put me down on a short in
Cabin. Stripping off what was left of my duck
trousers which the third had stuck to pieces
the whole thing was visible the skin and
flesh was torn and lacerated from the ankle
to above the knee full three or more inches wide
and where the skin was not broken on the others

ports of the lamb it was black and blue
it was a fearfull wound Capt Gardner looked
at it and then said I hardly know my boy
always called either my Boy or Helpt. what
to for you. I made no reply and then he said
what do you think my Boy is best to do for
you. I replied well Sir I think that something
ought to be done to keep things from sticking to
this mangled flesh. he said yes yes but what
well Sir if you will allow me to have the job
I think that I can manage it so said
he replied so I told the Steward to open my chest
and get a white short gundy under the till
he brought a new linen shirt in a moment
I said Strik it up onto strips four inches wide.
The Capt said that is a new linen shirt
hold on dont cut it. he went to his chest and
brought a large bundle of bandages all rolled
up ready for us. there are better being docters
knot the shirt away. I cut off about a foot of one
of the bandages rolled it up and said I suppose
Captain that you have a bottle of Sweet Oil
in the medicine chest if you will allow me
to use a host of it I think it will be the best
thing. He had the bottle there in a moment
I told the Steward to get an old bedcover
and now cut some of the Oil and take roll
of cotton that I had rolled up and haent the
wound with it. The Capt hold on a minute
went to his aram and brought a small paint
brush saying this will be better and himself

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proceeded to coat the wound and leg.
Ethos had oiled a strip of cloth which was laid
on the round from ankle to hip then I told
my brother Doat Steers master to pass the
legs from ankle to hip then getting a haire
of linnen draws from my chest I drew them
in after a fashion and they put me in my berth
lying on my back. I said now sir the Baby is
put to bed the nurses can all be dismissed
I thank them all kindly I am sure, I shall
soon be mended again sir I trust there are no
bones broken only a flesh wound and my
flesh heals very quickly always. I shall soon
be mended again. Then he said very fulingly
if anything will help you it will be your
own hopeful cheerful nature we will
do what we can for you. and he gave the
second mate orders to have a Doat Steers stay
by him in his watch and pass the order for
the next watch to do the same. I then said
Capt Gardner it is not necessary for any one to
stay with me I can get on all alone all right.
You cant do it my Boy you will do. Still an
two hours that you can spare a limb then
is men enough in this ship to take care of
her and you to. I thought that I had said
to much and I did not men Capt Gardner
any opposition to your orders he sent me that
in a moment I knew just what you meant my
Boy we will care for you. I thank you kindly sir
and all went on deck to their duty but my

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nursed the next morning I was stiff and
sore and lame all over I lay still in my
berth drew my curtain and tried to hear little
trouble as possible. Capt. Gardner enquired each
morning how I felt I used to try to think of some
chubbly joking answer when he asked me
how I felt. The first morning I told him that
I felt all over more than I had felt before in
all my life there was no place but no same
And soon as he had told me but they were
all flesh wounds and would soon be better.
My wound healed very fast the oil kept
the flesh soft so that it did not scab over.
at all he renewed the dressing every fourth
day and in two weeks I was at my work again
every man in the ship appeared rejoiced to
see me again except the old mate and he
had not one drop of human kindness on his
whole head he was simply an old hog ten times
as much brute as man. I never had any real
difficulty with him but I hated and despised
him as did every man in the ship from the
Capt to the cook he never could endure to see any
I believe that I gained more comfort at any time
the ship by being Chubbly and uncomplaining
than by being sharp and always trying to make
the best of anything that was disagreeable, and
I can look back now at this late day and
see that the experiences of that early voyage day as I
then was have been very useful to me since

I had during that voyage as Boat Steerer two 18
narrow escapes without being hurt however but
I do not think it worth while to narrate them here
but will confine myself to the most serious or narrow
escapes. We returned home with a full ship
and Capt Gardner chose me to go his second
mate in the same ship on the same kind of
a voyage. We made a voyage over the same
route and returned with a full ship there
being only three days difference in the length
of the voyage. During the cruise I had a very
narrow escape. Being got to a large whale
I had struck as I was laying near the whale
waiting for the boat to get got to him quite
at a safe distance from the whale all at once
I heard terrible crash and found myself
far down under water. That was the first
that I knew. The blow that struck us must
have dashed me for the moment so that the
first thing I knew was to hear the crash
I was under water so soon as the boat was
stole. It happened in this way. A loose whale
that had not been seen had come up under
my boat and bumped under my fut and
the far sent me head first over board and
down very deep. The next instant he struck
the boat with his flukes and cut the head of
the boat entirely off a few feet about 2 feet from
where I was standing. Had I been knocked
out of the boat before he struck he would have

probably broke me all to pieces. As it was I 19
down many fathoms before the boat was stern
I swam up up up as fast as I could. At first
it was dark but it grew lighter all the time
and I knew that I was sunk down. I was on
of just swimming and done my best then but
I felt that I could not hold my breath any
longer and I said to myself my time is come I
can do no more I heard the men in the boats
that were picking up my crew saying
distinctly he is gone the is gone. and I think
that I had almost stopped swimming up
having given up just at this moment my
head came above the water and I saw the
lefts boat on one side and the third mate
on the right every man of my crew in the looks
boat. which shows how long I had been under
the water. They came after that when my head came
above water my face was pulled up and very
red and my eyes protruded out of my head.
they hauled me into the looks boat. I had kept
my mouth closed and not swallowed any
water and I was all right in five minutes
My ship was slowly and we pulled alongside of
her. I said please Sir let me take your boat
and try to get another whale. He replied. I
dont want my boat more. I felt this remark to
be undecorated and cruel as no sort of blame
could attach to. the poor whale could just as
well come up under him as me he was as near
the boat whale as I I was vexed and instantly

ordered my men on deck to clear away the 20
Boat overhead, which was the shore boat we
always used whilst repairing a Steamer Boat. I jumped
in on deck and with all the energy of my nature
hurried to get the Boat down urging the men to
hurry then no more whales only a few miles
lengths from the ship. In the mean time the Capt
had got on after the whales nor let me go either
he come on deck. I had got the Boat one end of
starting off jump into my Boat my Boy and
met them. instantly I came out man the stern
Boat you wait Boat men and you down the
companion ladder followed by my crew and in
a minute or two were off. The Capt dug out
just then pull round the stern my Boy quick
is your plan my Boy as I came out from
under the ship's stern the wind took off my
Painimor that overboard I did not even look
after it he pulled up a couple of miles lengths to
windward then laid for the whales which were
coming right for me in two minutes more we
had two more on another whale and turned
him close to the ship. he got three large whales
all turned up not half a mile apart. my first
whale the mate struck and when he turned up
he tied the two pieces of my to his whale and so
I saved everything. The third mate got a whale also.
When I got on board I found my left leg very
sore and examination showed that it was as bad
as possible from the knee to the hip when I had
stood in the Elmsy left the water was that

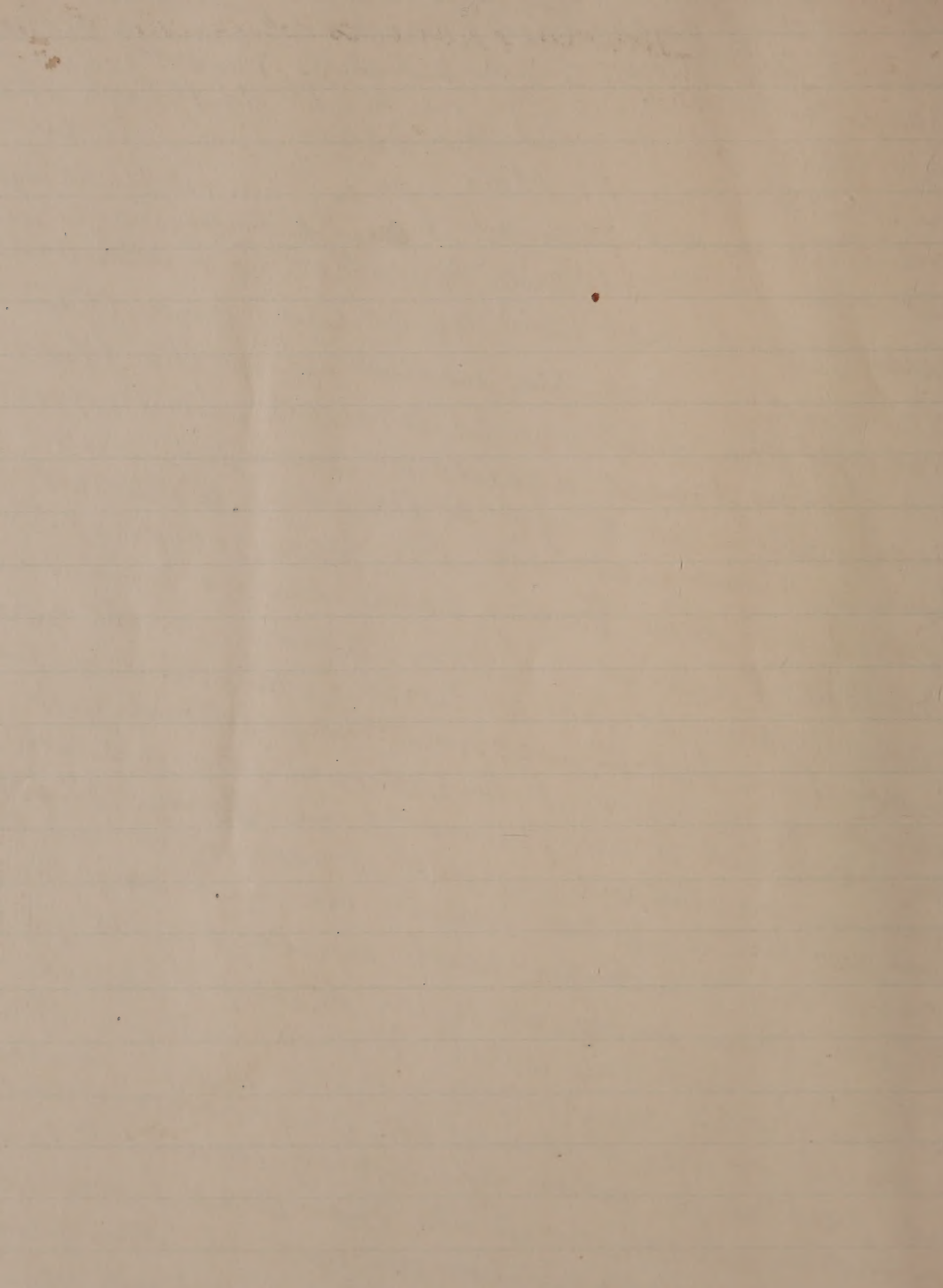
leggs was not broken. It was not to be that was all. 21
On looking over what I have written I find that
I have forgotten to narrate one of the narrowest chances
that I ever had which happened during the voyage
on which I was a Boat Stower. When bound home and
off Cape Horn we were heaving under three cloths
setted Top Sails right before the wind. There was a
terrible sea on and then came up the blackest sky
and the wildest and most threatening time that
I have ever seen the ship had the click and
clewed up the Mizen Top Sail. I went up with
others to furl it and when we came down the
Capt ordered the Fore Top Sail clewed up. as I
went forward to execute the order the Capt said to
me you go aloft with a jacket on if you fall
overboard nothing in the world will save you.
It was blitting snow and rain and I had once
short jacket. I of course made no reply that is not
allowable on ship board. I went aloft and we
furled the Top Sail and whilst doing it there
was a heavy snow fall that filled the rigging
and took of the dead eyes. The Mizen rigging set
up above the rail. As I came down I staid on the
top of one of the dead eyes that was secured with
iron. When my foot slipped and the rattling that
I had shot of broke as I went down just as the
ship rolled to starboard I went down abreast of the
fourth course of Lopper which was away down under
her bottom as I went down I naturally struck
out my hands towards the ship and I caught
the bite of the Fore Mast that was towering on
the water. we had hauled up the Fore
Sail

I came up the side by the aid of the fore that like 22
a, cat and landed in quick. as I did so an
old fellow we had on board caught hold of both
my hands and hauled cut man overboard man
overboard. as loud as he could yell. I tried to
stop him but he kept up his yells and brought
all hands to us to send out what was the matter
I broke away from him and hit him a pull
blow on the breast which stop him. The Capt
enquired how I came to do this. I related the whole
circumstance. Then he said well my boy that was
a short call all the men in the world could
not have saved you if you had not caught that
rope which was when it ought not to have been
this was as narrow a chance as could be still I
was hurt in the least.

After I came home as Second Mate. I had
three ships offered me the Lancaster. the Arab
the Phoenix usually called the Old Phoenix to
distinguish her from the young Phoenix of
the same owners. I chose the Lancaster.
Sailing about the Equator we made a little Isl
in Lat 6 South. And saw that there was wreckage
on the shore. I hauled in the South side of the Isl
which was the lee side onto the edge of the roller
reef and then ran back over the coral reef to the
land. I anchored the boat just in the edge of the
reef and a Kanacker swam on shore and
brought oil and try pots other things then he
of Kentucky. The next morning I closed in with
the Isl went on with a boat and

Anchored the Boat and started to swim 23
on shore. I had never been in any heavy
swim swimming or I never should have
attempted it. Three men went in with me
when we got into the roller I saw a very heavy
roller coming and turned to face it and as it
tumbled far over my head I dove into it thinking
to hold my own as I did so the roller took me
up like a cork ended me over backwards over
and over a dozen times and I went into
the roller which carried me along over the coral
reef when the water was not more than foot deep
as I attempted to catch hold of the projecting coral
to stop myself it cut my hands. I rolled over and
over like a log and when the breakers went
I found myself in a long narrow crack hole. I got
both hands bolt of the coral and held on to get
breath. I had kept my mouth closed and had not
inhaled any water but I so exhausted that
although I could hold on I could not get out. I
was fearful that the next sea would force me
against the rocks and split. Just then I heard
my men I saw him going this way I called
out and they hauled me out. I asked my men
how it was that I saved so much worse than they
and the white told me that they followed the Kanakas
and when the big sea came they headed in shore
and went in with it down up to the dry land
I found that the Independence had been wrecked
there and there was three hundred bbls of
oil stored there with other things

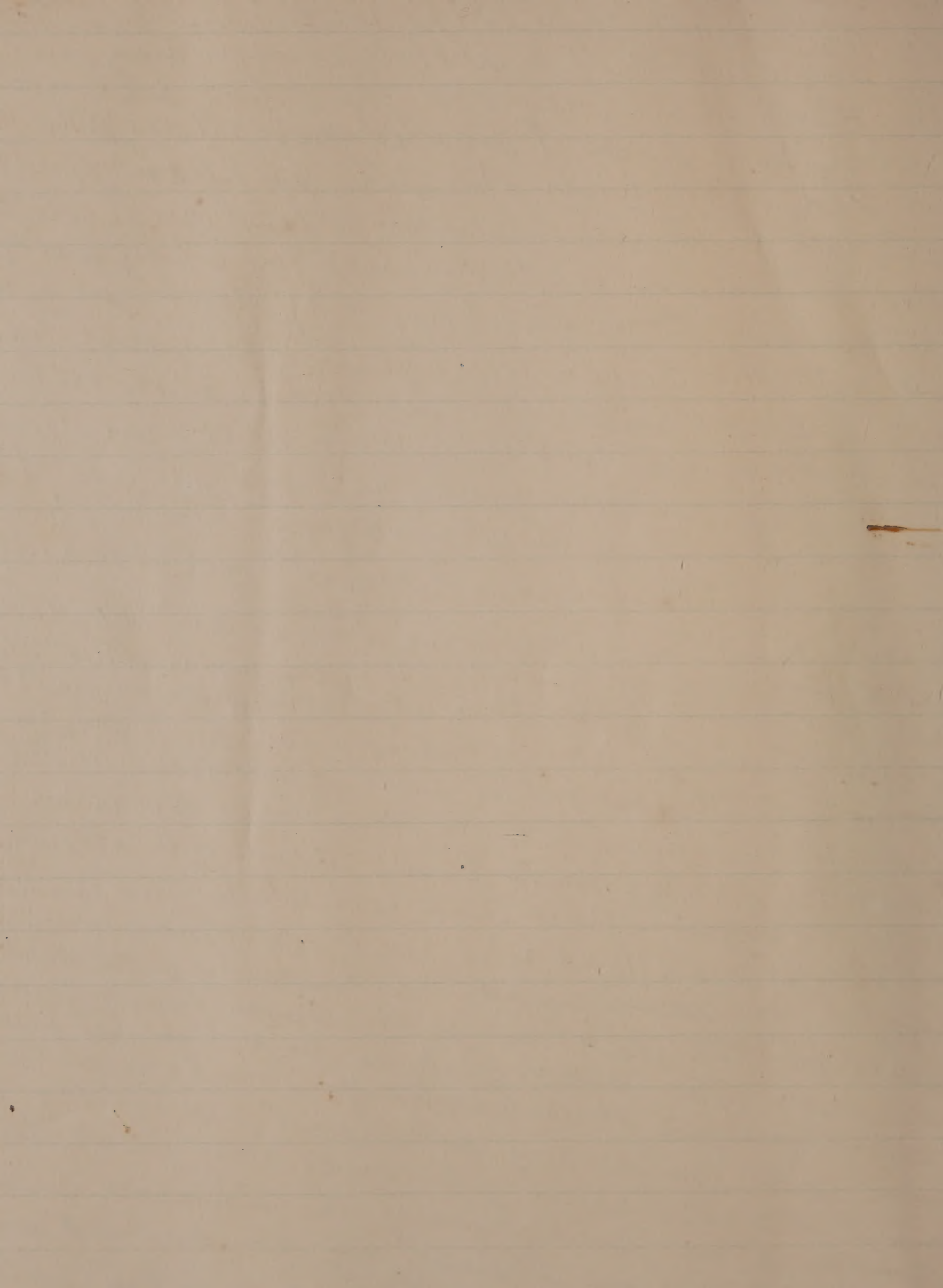
24
The surf did not go down any and we
had to get off again. Our Kanakas? Some say
he was a boat steerer and a very smart fellow
I said to him how are we to get off through those
big breakers. Oh he said the savvy men follow
me we take you off. There was a Tokmost Pludding
good then and I thought I could manage with
that when we got outside the roller. So I told old
Friday that he was to go ahead and the
rest would follow. We made off on the flat
oval reef the roller would come in about a foot
and he braced against it dragging our
shor all in and got to the edge of the reef
then we stood watching the sea roller after
passed us then Friday said now go and swim
like hell I hurried my shor all in and got
it and swam as fast as possible. The other got
ahead of me but it was smooth after we got
outside of the roller. I looked behind me and
was horrified to see four or five large sharks
following me. On an instant it occurred to me that
there was ten times as much danger as if there
was but one shark for each would try to get the
first bite. Then it occurred to me that if I showed
the shor behind me and struck out for the
boat the sharks might stop at the shor for a
moment or two. I showed the shor behind me
and put on for dear life. Looking behind I saw
the sharks all around the shor and I reached
the boat and was in her in no time. The shor
drifted out with the tide and we
broke it up.



During the second voyage as most there was
no especially narrow escape to relate the voyage
was successful And I retired from the sea on it.
And went with my brother to the sea and at was on the
Vella River on the that I had a very narrow
escape. We were hauling a very large and difficult
piece of timber and had secret spoke of heavy of an
hooked to the draft. I got up on the tongue where
I could see the road ahead and call the men so as
to give order instantly as we went with a rush
when we did start. I was holding on to the lever
which was about as high as as my heart. and we
were going on a run over some rough and broken
ground where there many stumps on the road.
I called out to put them up and we were moving along
when the stringing chain which held up the ^{after} ~~forward~~
end of the load struck a stump which broke it short
if down went the head end of the timber and
when the lever came down to which I was holding -
the ground flat on my back knocking the breath
out of me so that I could not move. I lay secret
exactly under the wheel and within two feet
of it had it rolled one quarter way over it
would have crushed my chest or fat as a board
Ordinarily there was nothing to stop these wheels
they were chained to the forward axle and had to follow
the axle but as if by a miracle or some supreme power at
the moment the chain broke it ^{the timber} ~~blew~~ a little to
one side and struck a large stump stopping the
load instantly just as I fell under the wheel. Then
the forward wheel broke the

Chain hooked to the trigue. The men
 held me out from under the wheel to live to
 experience other escapes. It was a dot call out &
 was not hurt only a little stepped with fall.
 The next escape was also on the Bulla River.
 We had a Serick in the ship yard where we
 were mending a Frigate's frame. The lighter was
 being loaded by the Serick. The lighter caught on
 stumk and we could not pry her off. I ordered
 the dock hooked on to the corner of the lighter
 to try and left her so she could be pried off. We
 were having pretty hard on her as the hand hard.
 There was a pile of timber closely that was piled
 up overpiled so that there was a hollow place in
 the pile of about three feet long and something
 less the other way. I was standing on this pile so
 the guy to the North supporting the strain as we
 were having was chained to a large side oak
 tree. We had a very heavy strain but there was
 no sign of the lighter going off and the tide was
 falling. There was imminent danger of breaking our
 only lighter so I shove more strain that I would
 otherwise have done. Chain to the guy broke and
 the arm and came down I saw it coming
 directly towards me and jumped down in the
 hole in the pile of timber crunching in one
 corner. At the end of the arm was a heavy iron
 block with iron sheave and heavily strapt.
 at full directly down in hole that I scouted in
 and passed within six inches of me

and went into the hard ground more than a 24
foot my cukes more to the south and I should
have been crushed to a shapeless mass. Every one
of the twenty men knew that the block and gun
exactly when I was. I crawled out along side the
spoor and stood upon the pile as I was before the
same fell. Everyone seemed to be horrified, I
called out in an authoritative tone when were you
all standing there gapping why dont you come
and get this done up again. Then all hands
gave a cheer and Mr. Evans said in loud
voice it is no use nothing will kill you you
always slip out from under he come up to the
pile and I jumped down saying I will show
you just how much I can room I had 7 or 8 only
but inches. at the same time the chain started
the lighter sled off herself. It was another close
call for me. After this at Dunlawton on the
Halifax River I was returning to camp on my
horse and missing the trail a little below the
Dunlawton place I got on some low ground
where there was peatmoss & scrub and all at once
my horse toppled down and fell with me under
him the ground was very soft. My horse soon
wiggled me down under the mud I could not
keep them still and he soon cleared himself from
me and after several failures he got on his feet
on peat ground there awaited for me I crawled out
covered with mud my left hand was terribly
lacerated the skin and flesh was torn from the
whole back of the hand leaving the sinews and
muscles entirely bare. I tied my handkerchief over
it instead of going back and looking up the



the Kathos trail I went straight to the north
 and came to a ditch which I waded across
 leading my horse who went in almost to his back
 once over and looking round I saw an Hurricane
 tore on which I climbed and so got on my horse
 again soon found the trail and rode to camp.
 I rode at once to the mens cook house and
 ordered the two cooks to come over to head quarters
 and help me off my horse. My wife was there
 that winter. I told her my horse had fogged
 with me and fell on me but that I was not
 badly hurt no bones broken arm now only bruised
 but covered with a fine coat of black mud. asked
 her to have her no man fell all the boilers and
 heat the water as quick as she could in the mean
 time we would cross my head which was hurt
 We got some warm water and cleaned it from
 the mud then soaked a cotton ball with kerosene
 removed my old experience of long before at
 sea. laid the old cotton on the back of the hand
 and covered it nicely and did not open it for
 near a fortnight when it was almost entirely
 healed. By that time the water was hot and I
 was soon in the bath tub my wife squeezed off
 the mud and found the left leg from the
 ankle to up to my nose as black as a negroes hide
 there was some raw places on the outside of
 the leg which we covered with oil bandages
 and dressing the back parts with Rum I
 put on clean cloths and at late afternoon
 soon went to bed. the next day I laid in
 bed all day but the next day I had my men
 put me on my horse and I rode out into
 the Harbourock and saw Mr Delano. Made

thing in I remember seeing the tree fall ²⁷
but nothing more. She Doc told me what had ²⁸
happened and I understood it all then. ²⁹
I said that the end of the limb had struck a little on
one side of the top of the head and had cut a gash
two inches long peeling down the skin and meat
from the skull leaving it clean white and bare for two
inches or more. That it was bleeding badly. I told them
put me on the head of a water keg sitting up and
to pour water from a water keg directly into the
wound and let it fall several inches. Mr Delano was
afraid to pour cold water into the wound. I said
he had no cold water there was not within fifty miles
to do as I directed as long as I had my senses so
the hood on strictly two gallons of water and then
stopped the flow of blood. I tied a handkerchief over
the wound they put me on my horse I was four
miles from camp. Mr Delano insisted that I
should allow him to send a man with me
and finally I consented to let him. He took the
horse and led the horse by neck and shoulder
felt as if I had snipers down them. I could
not move my head the least in any direction.
After going a mile or so I told the man to
go. I gave him the horse and go back to his work
and tell Mr Delano that I sent him that I could
go in all night alone. When I got to the camp
I called Charley Hetherway my clerk and told
him to call the cooks who took me off my horse
then I told Charley to get a junk of Borax from
the store room and set one of the cooks to pound

all arrangements, and back to camp with a 30
whit the more for the ride although I could only
reach the Mon. Had there been roots under me
or hard ground probably sometimes would have
been broken but on the whole I got off very fortunately.
This was not so dangerous an episode as the
preceding and perhaps ought to have been left
out. The next was a far more dangerous one
it was in the Chotahochy when we were getting
thru. I rode out closing for most trees as I
did every day and coming on when Mr
Delano was at work about 2 PM I found that
a large tree was about to fall. I rode back
behind it so as to be well out of the way and
sat on my horse to see it fall. It fell against
another tree. The top scraping the limbs off
and bending the tree over until I thought it
would break but it rolled off and broke down
the limbs and split it and fell to the ground
the tree that had been bent over so hard
clew took and of the limbs that had been
broken off was shot back with the spring of the
rest straight back considerable distance and
the fell to the ground of course but end first
as there was foliage on the outer side. I did
not see it or know anything about it until
Mr Delano said come down straight and struck
me on the top of the head knocked me cinders to
the ground. The spirit thing I knew I was sitting
up two men holding me and Mr Delano was
washing the blood out of my eyes and mouth
I opened my eyes and could not see the

it to powder and to get the needle from the
 medicine chest and by sight back and thread
 at a white Beth and I was up he was soon
 ready and of the looks both the skin and flesh together
 and I was down at it all which then he put the
 wound of the skull and covered it over with the
 powder of Draf and done it up as well as he
 could. My shoulder and neck was terrible stiff
 and sore but the wound on the skull gave not the
 least pain it was simply sore to the touch and
 less than a week we took of the bandage and it
 was entirely healed up. Had the comb struck one
 inch further to the left it would have penetrated
 the skull and I should not have known anything
 about it. As at that point my skull is thin and
 I can at any time pierce or bend the bones down
 there was another short corner and elot
 call and even where it did strike the chances
 were that a concussion of the brain would occur from
 such a blow more than half the time.

LOG # 955 Rodolphus N. Swift, 4 voyages 1827-1838

